

Eugenics history as a mirror to the future

The birth, rise, and fall of a science and its effects in current times

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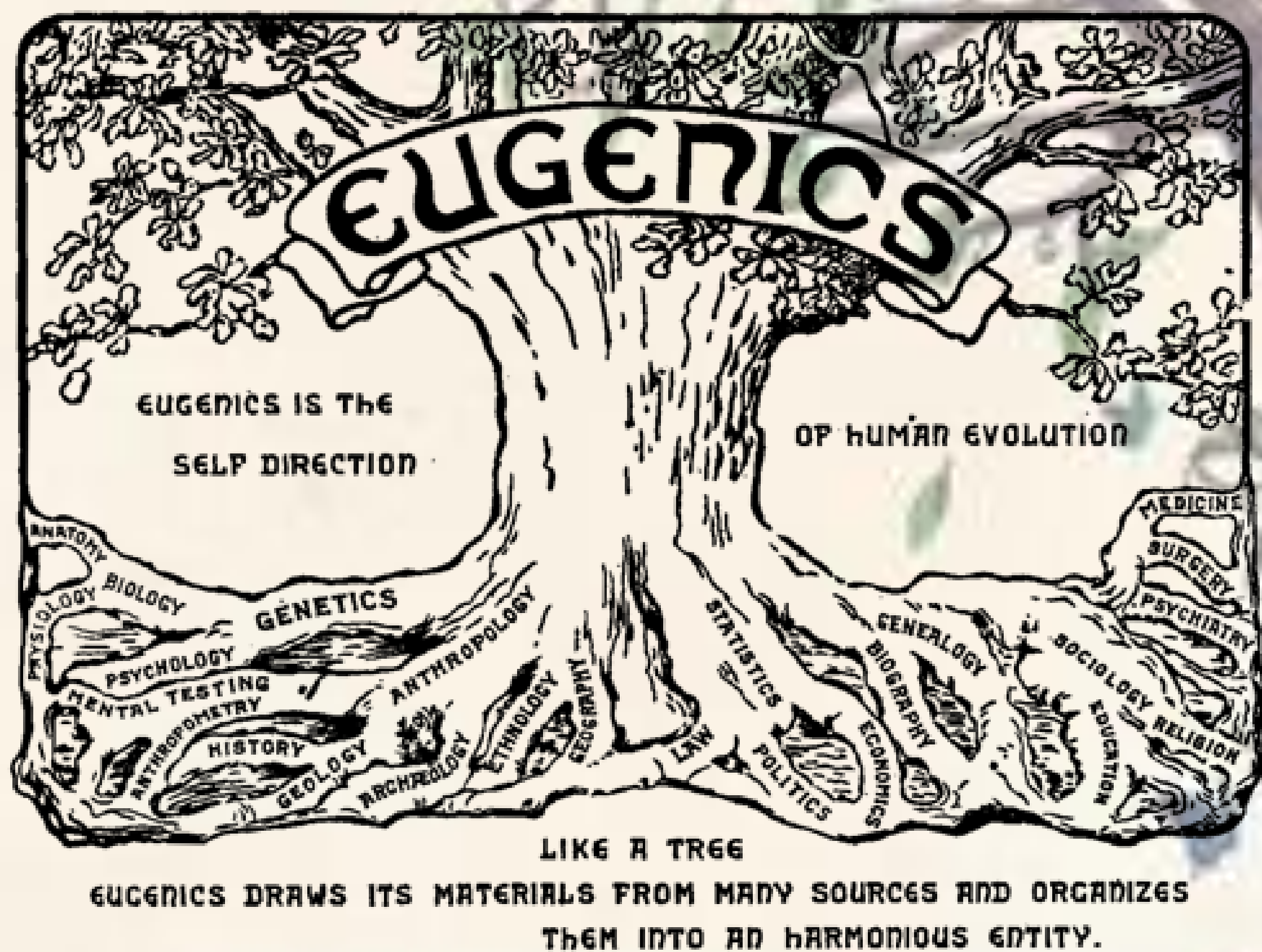
INTRODUCTION and main AIMS

- Divulagation work about the history of eugenics as a science. Analysis of the precedents, beginning, rise, applications and crash of eugenic movement. See how both science and society influence each other and evolve together, making it hard in many cases to discern them.
- In addition, the work tries to meditate about the current and future eugenics situation. Focusing on the analysed historical perspective, several future scientific and social development pathways might be considered.

ORIGINS

The word eugenics was first coined by Francis Galton in 1883 in his *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*. What he meant was the improvement of the human race by better breeding, using the recently described heredity laws. The scientific world context was strongly influenced by the discoveries of Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel.

While Darwin just described what he found, Galton aimed to prescribe how natural selection had to be manipulated in order to improve human kind. That way of thinking succeeded among modern governments and new eugenic politics were developed. Scientific politics based on statistics, probabilistic, and hereditary mechanisms.



Cartoon that appeared at the Second International Eugenics Exhibition in New York City in 1921

POSITIVE EUGENICS

Positive eugenics focuses on enhancing the reproduction of a certain population part. Those with traits considered superiors and thus, desirable to rise their frequency within the society. It worked mainly by two different branches: on one hand trying to make population grow, with pro-nativity politics or investing in infertility treatments; on the other hand it also tried to get a “fitter population” by improving environmental conditions or by the creation of public health system.

Negative eugenics involves all the techniques and politics which seek the reproduction prevention of those with traits considered inferior. It includes all the initiatives of sterilization, contraception and segregation. Its most extreme point that negative eugenics reached was ending with people’s lives. Not only with euthanasia but with new-borns non-treatment.

NEGATIVE EUGENICS



The winner family of the “Fittest family contest” in Kansas, USA. Great example of positive eugenics and how normal its practices were.

TRANSVERSAL FEATURES

- Eugenics became so broadly shared thanks to its **scientific basis**. That helped most of the governments that back in late XIX century began to create their laws following scientific criteria.
- Huge migration movements in that time and colonial and post-colonial territories enhanced the creation by new and old governments of **racial segregation laws**.
- The improving of medical knowledge and infection biology promoted the implementation of rules **against infected people marriages and reproduction**.
- **Quantitative parameters** became essential in order follow the human classification needed to follow eugenic movement.
- The most broadly shared and linked to eugenic were the **sterilization laws**.

After World War II eugenics was so criticized that became a taboo. The global thought started to link inseparably the Nazi regime with eugenics

However, eugenic movement had had strong sceptics since the very beginning. At early 30s it was said that eugenic techniques were not applied just following scientific criteria. **Racial purity** (obviously, the race and class of those who were selecting) was beginning to take relevance.

CRITICS

Not only ethical critics were displayed, at scientific level further critics start to raise as the scientific knowledge was improving. For instance, based on recessive characters criteria, it was said that most of the problems that eugenic politics tried to solve were unsolvable due to huge frequency of undetectable asymptomatic carriers within the population.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Eugenics was not in any case a genocide or Nazism synonym. It was a worldly shared movement, being not of a specific place but of a specific time

Even though its politic implications, eugenics was born as a science, purely based on statistics and hereditary mechanisms.

Despite of its historical negative point of view, eugenics brought huge social developments as public health. **Eugenics is not intrinsically bad.**

The so-called “first” eugenics era ended after certain causes and historical contexts with wide known and horrible consequences for human kind. Nowadays thanks to huge improvements in molecular biology and reproductive techniques we are living a “second” big era of eugenics. Parallelisms in cultural and social contexts, especially after comparing with pre-Nazi German society, make think about worrying scientific and social development pathways.

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